



EPISODE 2x21:

“Can’t Stop the Signal”

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Teaser

EXT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – LANDING STRIP– ESTABLISHING

SERENITY is down, torn up and tail-first in a trench. Smoking. The bridge window is shattered and going through it we see—

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – CONTINUOUS

—WASH impaled in his pilot's chair by a Reaver harpoon.

ZOË is already moving.

ZOË

Wash!

EXT. LANDING STRIP HANGAR – SAME TIME

The HUNTER SHIP sinks to the landing strip—predatory, dangerous, stalking—as another REAVER VESSEL slowly circles around to flank Serenity.

INT. SERENITY'S BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Zoë cradles Wash's head in her hands, runs her fingers through his hair, tries to bring him around.

Wash is gone.

ZOË

Wash baby baby no, come on, you gotta move you gotta
move baby please—

MAL moves to the bridge's window, looks outside in time to see—

EXT. LANDING STRIP HANGAR – SAME TIME

—a hatch on the Hunter opens and fires a harpoon at Serenity's bridge.

INT. SERENITY'S BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Mal dives for Zoë as the harpoon crashes through what's left of the window.

EXT. SERENITY – RAMP – SAME TIME

The area is filled with smoke and debris from the crash landing and broken bits of the complex itself.

Serenity's RAMP lowers and JAYNE rides it down, crouching with VERA in his hands and his torso draped with weapons and ammo.

JAYNE
(to the crew behind him)
Stay close.

He jumps off the ramp before it hits the ground. The rest of the crew follow numbly. INARA supports a dazed KAYLEE with her shoulder. BEN desperately clutches his LAPTOP BAG. SIMON, his MEDICAL BAG slung over one shoulder, holds RIVER by the waist as he guides her along.

Kaylee pauses at the foot of the ramp and looks back at the wreckage of Serenity.

KAYLEE
(whispered, tears in her eyes)
Thanks for the ride, girl...

A beat, and then Jayne grabs her by the shoulder and points her down the ramp, toward the ENTRANCE to Mr. Universe's complex.

JAYNE
We gotta move.

KAYLEE
We gotta wait for the others.

INARA
We can't leave without Mal—

JAYNE
'Cept that's what we're gonna do.

KAYLEE
The Cap'n—

JAYNE
—would want us to rabbit!

SHADOWY FIGURES appear in the smoky distance, some rappelling down from the second Reaver vessel, others simply LEAPING into the smoke and chaos.

INARA
Leaving them behind is a death sentence.

JAYNE
So's stayin' here!

Growls and snarls carry easily to the crew.

Jayne fires randomly into the smoke. Something screams, angry and feral. He stands his ground, and looks pointedly at Inara.

JAYNE (cont'd)
G'wan. Now!

Inara nods and tries to hustle the others off. Kaylee and Ben follow, but the Tams linger behind. Simon points his gun, trying to look heroic, but mostly looking awkward.

River stares up at Serenity.

RIVER
Leaves blown away. Trees stripped bare. Weeping.

Jayne lobs a grenade into the smoke.

JAYNE
Great, maybe she can creepify the gorram Reavers to death. Fire in the hole!
(to Simon)
Go!

The grenade explodes somewhere on the landing strip and debris rains down.

JAYNE (cont'd)
Get her outta here!

The first REAVERS, little more than silhouettes, begin to lope out of the smoke. Jayne mows them down, yelling as he fires.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – AIRLOCK – SECONDS LATER

The Tams stumble through the smoke into the airlock, where Inara, Kaylee, and Ben are waiting for them. Kaylee and Inara look past Simon, but see that he and River are alone.

The gunfire and screaming can be heard in the distance.

They all cough as smoke starts to pour into the airlock. Ben reaches for the BUTTON to close the door. Inara stops him with a shake of her head, then looks into the smoke.

The sound of gunfire—multiple weapons now—gets closer.

INARA

They're coming!

They barely have time to get out of the way before Jayne barrels in at full tilt, running so hard he almost crashes into the far wall.

Mal is only a few steps behind him, firing back over his shoulder.

MAL

Down!

Everyone drops except Simon—but River pulls him down—as a volley of arrow-like DARTS peppers the far door. One hits the ACTIVATION BUTTON for the inside door, sending off a volley of sparks.

The interior of the airlock is a jumble of smoke, screaming, and projectiles. Mal scurries to the door.

Zoë backs into the airlock almost casually, firing at the unseen Reavers with each step. Her gun clicks dry and Mal hits the door button.

Huge, thick blast doors close from the sides AND top and bottom, creating the effect of a square hole getting smaller.

As the blast door seals, something much larger than a dart SLAMS against the outside.

With the door closed, the smoky room is filled with a mix of coughing and sighs of relief. Then:

KAYLEE

Where's Wash? Oh, God, he's still out there!

Zoë starts loading her mare's leg with calculated precision.

ZOË

No, he isn't.

KAYLEE

What do you mean? Where is he?

Zoë shoves a bullet in. And another. Her face is inscrutable, her voice cold.

ZOË

He's ain't comin'.

Act One

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – AIRLOCK

Zoë and Jayne stand ready to shoot anything that makes it through. Reavers pound and scrape from the other side.

JAYNE

That door ain't gonna last.

On the other side of the room, Ben and Kaylee have the PANEL open by the damaged activation button to the inside door. Ben has schematics up on his laptop, comparing them to the TANGLE OF WIRES spilling out from the panel. Mal looms over them.

BEN

(pointing from the laptop to the wires)

D'you think that's the cutoff?

Kaylee shakes her head in frustration as she works through the wires.

Mal turns from them to Inara, who has a COM UNIT in her hand.

INARA

(shakes her head)

Something's wrong. I can't raise him.

MAL

Keep trying.

He flinches at the sound of a layer of metal being PRIED OPEN on the outer door. Zoë stares at the door, waiting.

BEN

Where'd Mr. Universe get all this stuff from? This module is Alliance military.

MAL

You can ask him yourself once you get that door open.

(more banging from the Reavers)

Um... Can you get that door open?

BEN

If we can find the right wire...

He points to a wire. Kaylee shakes her head "No."

JAYNE
'If' ain't a 'yes'.

It sounds like the Reavers are peeling the layers of the airlock door away.

KAYLEE
Try the red one. It's always the red one.

Ben reaches into the bundle, grabs the red wire Kaylee is pointing to and twists it hard. There's a CRACKLE of energy—Ben jumps back, fingers singed—and the interior airlock door irises open.

The sounds of the Reavers tearing apart the exterior door intensify. Mal moves to look through the newly opened exit.

MAL
(confused)
Oh, now, <what sweet new hell is this>?!?

He's looking into:

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – BLACK ROOM – CONTINUOUS

The room is huge, lit by banks of violet black-lights, a vast expanse filled with BOXES and CRATES stacked double the height of a tall man. Packing material spills out of some. The boxes have turned the room into a giant maze, with no clear exit.

INT. THE OPERATIVE'S DART – SAME TIME

The one-man Alliance escape pod is little more than a glorified coffin. THE OPERATIVE is crammed inside, tilted a little to the side, lit with emergency-red, looking dazed, like he's had a rough landing.

He braces himself.

OPERATIVE
Initiate standard ejection procedure.

Nothing happens.

He turns; sees that a FLEXIBLE MICROPHONE hangs loose from its mount. He grunts, reaches down in the claustrophobic confines of the dart and fiddles with the MANUAL OVERRIDE CONTROLS.

Explosive bolts blow with a HISS and CRUMP, shooting the front panel/top of the dart straight up... for about six inches.

EXT. MR. UNIVERSE MOON – DART – SAME TIME

The terrain is rugged and rocky, laying in jagged folds. The dart is wedged in a crack in the side of a hill. The front panel has no room to come off.

INT. THE OPERATIVE'S DART – SAME TIME

The Operative squeezes an arm up and punches some buttons on a console at eye level.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)
Any units, please respond.

Chaos and screams scratch out of the console speakers.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)
Any units within range, please respond.

He tries another channel. More screams. And another. Yet more screams.

The Operative looks genuinely stricken as he flips from channel to channel.

Then—

A CLAWED HAND—a Reaver hand—thrusts in through the narrow opening, grabbing for the Operative's face.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – BLACK ROOM – SAME TIME

The crew has closed the airlock door behind them, and the Reaver noises are now a little more muffled.

BEN
So... Now what?

MAL
(lamely)
There should be a, um, monorail...
(studies the maze)
We always landed on the northeast arm. Ain't never seen this place before.

KAYLEE
Wash'd probably know...

She trails off to uncomfortable silence. Everyone looks at her except Zoë.

ZOË
(pointing)
There's a sign.

There is. On one tall stack is a bright orange spray-painted sign saying "DELIVERIES THIS WAY". An arrow underneath points to the right.

MAL
Zoë, take point. Jayne, cover our <asses>.

Behind them, through the airlock door, there's a terrible TEARING sound, followed by feral HOWLING. The Reavers are through the outer door.

MAL (cont'd)
Everyone stay close.

The crew hustles through the darkness toward the orange sign and arrow.

EXT. MR. UNIVERSE'S MOON – THE OPERATIVE'S DART – SAME TIME

The Operative struggles with the hand, but there is very little room to maneuver inside the dart. It's cramped, it's hot and it's brutal. He's got no leverage.

The hand lands on his face, the fingers clawing for his eyes.

The Operative bites down hard. Blood sprays the interior of the dart and the Operative's face. The Reaver howls, jerking his hand back.

The Operative spits out the bit of flesh in his teeth.

He takes a deep breath. Lets it out...

Then MORE HANDS make it inside—a half dozen, a dozen—all grabbing onto a piece of the Operative.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – BLACK ROOM – SAME TIME

Zoë leads the crew as they run through a narrow path in the boxes. She comes to a halt at a junction of another narrow path. She and Mal look at one another, at a loss for which direction to go.

In the distance: the HAMMERING noise of the Reavers trying to break through the inner airlock door.

SIMON
They're almost through.

JAYNE

And we ain't nowhere near. Third dead end this minute,
Mal.

Mal looks around, possibly looking for a way out, possibly just looking for something to shoot in frustration.

BEN

(squinting up at the ceiling)

Mal?

Ben points upward. Barely visible in the darkness are a series of cables, conduits, and pipes.

More pounding and howling in the distance.

BEN (cont'd)

That's the atmo bypass conduit, I reckon. This is a
standard military module, exit should be that way.

Ben follows the conduit's path on the ceiling. Below it is another spray-painted sign, clearly visible at the end of the path made by the boxes, its arrow leading left.

Zoë runs for it, mare's leg held at the ready. The others follow.

Another sign appears in a straight line of sight through the boxes. Again, they follow where it points to yet another sign.

MAL

Ben, how we doin'?

BEN

(looking up)

Bear right.

They turn. It's a solid wall of crates.

JAYNE

Tell that to the gorram boxes.

Behind them, the airlock door gives way and a roar rises from the Reavers.

INT. THE OPERATIVE'S DART – SAME TIME

The Operative tries to draw his sword, but he has no room. He swats the hands off, but there are too many, reaching, grasping...

For a few seconds, he is held and cannot move. A hand gropes toward his throat for a choke hold and the Operative squirms as far from it as possible.

The hand clears the Operative's battle armor...

He tries to pull the hand off, but others restrain him. His eyes go wide as his air supply starts to run out...

GUNFIRE cuts through the howls and the snarls. The Reaver hands and arms thrash and go limp. A few fall away from the crack.

Silence. The Operative breathes hard, shaken.

Then:

A face appears at the crack. Human. Friendly. Female.

WOMAN

Spec 7 Baker, sir. Sit tight. We'll get you out.

EXT. MR. UNIVERSE MOON – DART – SAME TIME

A small band of ALLIANCE MILITARY ENGINEERS—about two dozen—scramble through the area, some pointing rifles, many swarming near the dart.

They attach a series of CABLES to the dart. The cables are attached to a WINCH ASSEMBLY, which is part of a large crane-like tracked VEHICLE. Covered with winches, scoops, and assemblies, it's like the Swiss Army Knife of construction vehicles.

The cables pull taut.

INT. THE OPERATIVE'S DART – SAME TIME

The dart begins to inch upward.

OPERATIVE

(smiling slightly)

Thus arrives the cavalry...

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – BLACK ROOM – SAME TIME

The crew is at an intersection of paths in the boxes.

Mal points silently to his right. Everyone goes right, trying not to make any noise.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – BLACK ROOM – ELSEWHERE – SAME TIME

The REAVERS are in the maze of boxes.

The LEAD REAVER runs ahead of the pack, finger bones and shreds of desiccated skin worked through her hair swinging in time to her stride.

She comes to an intersection of the paths and stops, listening...

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – BLACK ROOM – SAME TIME

Kaylee stumbles and lands against the boxes, causing packing fluff and bits of debris to rain down with a rustle and clatter. Everyone freezes.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – BLACK ROOM – ELSEWHERE – SAME TIME

The Lead Reaver howls and barrels down the path through the boxes. The rest of the Reavers follow.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – BLACK ROOM – SAME TIME

They hear the Reavers thrashing toward them.

MAL

Move!

They run.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – BLACK ROOM – ELSEWHERE – SAME TIME

The Reavers hit an intersection. The Lead Reaver holds her arms out. The pack splits into two groups, going down either direction of the cross path.

The Lead Reaver goes after the group on the right.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – BLACK ROOM – SAME TIME

ZOË

(quiet, eerie calm)

They're flanking us.

MAL

Tell me something I don't know.

EXT. MR. UNIVERSE MOON – DART – SAME TIME

The Operative, now out of the dart, straightens his clothing. Some of the engineers are by the construction vehicle, others are already stripping the opened dart of valuable parts.

OPERATIVE
(turning to Baker)
Where's your ship?

Baker points behind her. The ship cannot be seen, but a column of OILY SMOKE rises into the air, maybe a quarter of a mile off.

BAKER
We were trying to evac to the surface, sir. One of those
gorram Reaver ships took out the whole gorram cockpit!
We're lucky we made it down to the surface at all.
(increasingly agitated)
I got—I've got more than half my unit gone, and almost a
dozen injured left at the site, probably bleedin' out while
we stand here jabberin'.
(remembering herself)
...Sir.

OPERATIVE
Your CO?

BAKER
In the cockpit, sir.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – BLACK ROOM – SAME TIME

Zoë strides forward through the boxes defiantly, without hesitation or self-regard. She stops beneath another spray-painted sign. Waits for the others to catch up.

MAL
Sick of this damn maze...

Noises from the Reavers carry clearly through the air, coming from multiple directions now.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – BLACK ROOM – ELSEWHERE – SAME TIME

The Lead Reaver and her party start to scale the boxes around them.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – BLACK ROOM – SAME TIME

Mal is side by side with Zoë, scoping out the way ahead.

INARA
(holding up the com unit)
He's still not answering.

RIVER
(looking up and over the boxes)
They'll be in Scotland before us.

Zoë follows her gaze.

ZOË
(to Mal)
They're taking the high ground now, too.

Ben gets Mal's attention, points up to a junction of pipes.

BEN
Shouldn't be far now.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – BLACK ROOM – ELSEWHERE – SAME TIME

The Lead Reaver gains the top of a stack of boxes. She jumps to the next stack...
And the next.

Other Reavers follow, spreading out along the boxes.

JAYNE (OS)
(not far away)
Don't be wrong, boy.

EXT. MR. UNIVERSE MOON – DART – SAME TIME

Baker looks like she doesn't like what the Operative has just told her.

BAKER
But, sir, I have injured. I can't abandon—

OPERATIVE
And you will not. But there's nothing you can do for them.
As soon as I have access to medical personnel, I will
divert them here—I promise you this—but for now, I need
you to follow me.

Baker stares at him.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)

There are terrorists on this moon. Terrorists intent on destroying the future of the Alliance.

(puts a hand on her shoulder)

Now, you've done admirably to this point, Baker—

She interrupts him by pointing to her mouth, the universal sign that he's got something on his own. He stops, touches his mouth, and his finger comes away wet with the Reaver blood that splashed there. He wipes it clean with his sleeve.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)

You've done admirably, but you and your soldiers—

BAKER

We're just engineers, sir.

OPERATIVE

(ignoring her)

You and your soldiers hold the future of the Alliance in your hands. I need you to gather as many men and as much equipment as you can and make for that complex.

The Operative points to Mr. Universe's COMPLEX in the distance.

BAKER

What about you, sir?

He turns and looks at the construction vehicle.

OPERATIVE

I need to be going.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – BLACK ROOM – SAME TIME

BEN

There it is!

It's another REINFORCED DOOR, with an orange smiley face spray-painted on it with the words "NO SOLICITORS" underneath.

Mal rushes forward, punches the controls, and the door irises open. As the crew starts to scramble inside—

A Reaver jumps down from the boxes and knocks into Mal.

Zoë is there almost immediately. She shoots the Reaver—once, twice, three times—then begins beating the dying creature with the stock of her mare’s leg.

MAL

Zoë!

Everyone is through the door except for Mal, Zoë, and Jayne.

JAYNE

Here they come!

Reavers are closing in from all sides, loping across the floor, dropping from the boxes...

MAL

ZOË!

He grabs yanks her away from the Reaver and pushes her through the door.

MAL

(to Jayne)

Tell me you saved some.

Jayne grins, nods, and lobs two GRENADES into the Reavers. He and Mal dive through the open door and into:

INT. MR. UNIVERSE’S COMPLEX – BLACK ROOM ALCOVE – CONTINUOUS

Simon slaps the button to close the door as they come through. A pair of BOOMS makes the door rattle, but it holds.

This room is like the airlock on the other side of the Black Room. It holds some boxes and pieces of abandoned equipment. The crew leans on them, breathing hard, catching their breath. River is backed into the corner and beginning to shake, staring at the ceiling.

Mal and Jayne grin at each other, starting to stand—

Several more BOOMS go off in quick succession, like a chain reaction. One... two... three... four... five... A fragment of something large BANGS into the outside of the door.

JAYNE

Must’a had something explosive in one’a them boxes.

MAL

Ya think?

Mal crosses the chamber to the far side, opens the door to:

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – ACCESS CORRIDOR – CONTINUOUS

The corridor beyond the blast door ends in a FREIGHT ELEVATOR visible at its far end, some fifty feet away.

MAL (cont'd)
Looks like the place.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – BLACK ROOM ALCOVE – CONTINUOUS

From beyond the door to the Black Room, growls start rumbling. Something solid hits the door with a clang.

Everyone jumps at the sound. Then they slowly gather together.

The clang turns into a steady pounding, the growls to snarls and howls.

RIVER
Everyone's here.

Mal looks at Zoë. She's staring at the closed door, ready for action.

MAL
(sigh)
Jayne, take point.

Jayne moves toward the blast doors but Zoë stops him with a hand on his arm.

ZOË
Sir. This is a good hold point.

MAL
No, we all stay together.

ZOË
You need speed more than numbers right now. One or two can go faster'n eight.

Zoë nods toward the door to the Black Room. It's beginning to vibrate from the abuse heaped on it from the other side.

ZOË
They'll have to come through here. They'll bottleneck and we can thin 'em out. We get pushed back, there's the blast doors.

KAYLEE

I can rig 'em so's they don't open once they close.

MAL

(not liking this)

Then you shut 'em. You shut 'em and hide.

The door groans and picks up its first visible dent.

Zoë turns at the sound and moves to stand before the door, her mare's leg ready.

ZOË

We need to draw them til it's done. This is the place. We'll buy you the time.

Mal turns to the others.

MAL

Do it. Move those crates. Block the door.

JAYNE

Bring that one over here for cover, make sure it ain't filled with nothin' goes boom.

Everyone scrambles to block the door, to make a barricade, while Kaylee fiddles with the control panel by the blast door leading to the access hallway.

Zoë stands guard. Not moving. Mare's leg up and covering the door.

Mal sweeps his gaze over his crew. They are crouched behind the boxes, facing him. Facing the door. Facing possible death.

The door gives another alarming groan.

MAL

Ben. You're with me.

(to the rest)

You hold. All of you.

Ben scrambles to his feet, gathering his laptop.

Mal moves to Zoë and grabs her arm, gives it a shake. She looks at him.

MAL

Zoë. You here?

ZOË

Do the job, sir.

A look passes between them.

MAL
You hold. Hold til I'm back.

He gives her arm a squeeze. Then, with a nod to Inara and the rest of the crew, Mal heads into the access hallway.

EXT. MR. UNIVERSE'S MOON – SAME TIME

The multi-purpose construction vehicle trundles over the terrain.

INT. CONSTRUCTION VEHICLE – CONTINUOUS

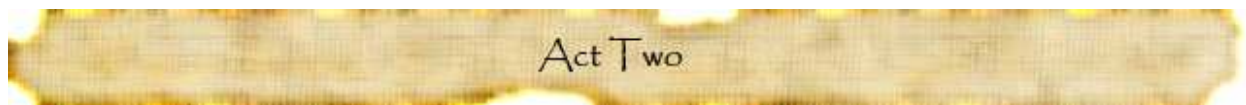
The Operative is behind the wheel.

BAKER (via com)
(interspersed with static)
But what about anyone who's not a Reaver?

OPERATIVE
If you encounter any civilians, contact me immediately.
And if for some reason you can't...

CLOSE IN on the Operative's face.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)
Kill them.



INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – MONORAIL CORRIDOR

The elevator at the end of the white tunnel dings and the doors slide open.

Mal eases out, gun-first, cautious. Ben follows, clutching his laptop.

BEN
Look, all I'm sayin' is maybe you shoulda took Kaylee
'stead o' me.

MAL
Keep this up, I'll go back and swap you out for her.
(edging down the hall)

I need one of you with me in case I encounter any technical contrariness... But Kaylee's their best chance when the bullets run out. So long's they can fall back and she's got stuff she can jigger, they got a fightin' chance. Can you do that?

BEN

No.

MAL

See there? S'better you're with me.

BEN

That what you told Wash?

Mal rounds on Ben before Ben even realizes what he's said.

MAL

He died a hero, boy. Don't spit on that.

BEN

(earnest)

But I ain't a hero and I don't wanna die.

Mal has nothing to say. He strides off, pissed. A few steps later:

MAL

(pointing ahead)

Hey. Monorail.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – BLACK ROOM ALCOVE – SAME TIME

The Reavers are pounding. The door is in pretty bad shape but it's still holding.

Kaylee rigs the blast door panel behind Jayne. She's visibly terrified. She slaps the panel closed and tries to recover by talking to Zoë.

KAYLEE

Doors're set.

A great big CLANG! from the door sends Zoë's mare's leg up in a flash, her finger on the trigger.

Kaylee looks like she wants to say something to Zoë; Jayne, oddly enough, is the one to intervene.

He picks up one of the weapons he's got lined up along the top of the barricade and on the floor and motions Kaylee over. He gives her the gun, wraps her fingers around it properly.

JAYNE

This here's Lucille. She got a little kick to her, but don't let that scare ya none. Just sight down her here...

KAYLEE

What's this button do here?

She presses it and the clip falls to the floor. Embarrassed, she stoops to pick it up but Zoë snatches it off the floor.

She takes the gun from Kaylee and slaps it back in. Cold. Efficient. Mechanical.

ZOË

That's how you reload. Squeeze the trigger, don't pull it.
(icy)
You think you can remember that?

Zoë leaves Kaylee and resumes her position, her back to everyone. Kaylee nods a 'kinda-sorta', then looks at Jayne.

KAYLEE

She gonna be okay?

JAYNE

Go on. Get back behind them boxes.

Jayne gives her a push. Another loud clang! from the door sends Kaylee scurrying back to Simon, River, and Inara.

Jayne hauls up and goes to Zoë.

JAYNE

Kaylee's right. Can't be thinking on revenge if we're gonna get through this.

Zoë looks at the assembled crew. Jayne follows her gaze.

Inara methodically assembles a weapon that's a cross between a bow and a rifle. The ammo for it is something between a bolt and an arrow. She has maybe a dozen of them before she's got nothing but a fancy metal stick.

Simon speaks quietly to River, who has a thousand-yard stare.

Kaylee stands awkwardly holding Lucille. The clip drops out of the gun again; she manages to get it back in on the second try.

Jayne looks back at Zoë. Zoë slides a look at him.

ZOË
(scoffs)
You think any of us is gonna get through this?

JAYNE
(hefts Vera, hopefully)
Well, I might.

INT. CONSTRUCTION VEHICLE – SAME TIME

The Operative looks forward, watching something.

EXT. MR. UNIVERSE’S MOON – CONTINUOUS

The vehicle is at the top of a rise, and below it is Mr. Universe’s sprawling complex.

A single compartment MONORAIL runs the track from a smoking outbuilding toward the central tower.

The vehicle changes course, heading straight for the tower.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE’S COMPLEX – BLACK ROOM ALCOVE – SAME TIME

The howling outside intensifies, the door gives a screech and visibly buckles.

ZOË
Jayne and I take the first wave. Nobody shoots ‘less they get past our fire.

Kaylee edges closer to Simon, gripping her gun nervously.

KAYLEE
Oh, I didn’t plan on going out like this. I think we did right, but...

SIMON
I never planned... anything. I just wanted to keep River safe.

They look at River. She’s in the corner, wall-eyed, but holding it together.

SIMON (cont'd)
Spent so much time on Serenity trying to find us a home
I never realized I already had.
(turning back to Kaylee)
My one true regret in all this is never being with you.

Across the room, Jayne rolls his eyes.

KAYLEE
With me? You mean to say, as...
(brightens)
Sex?

SIMON
(smiles a 'yes')
I mean to say.

KAYLEE
Hell with this. I'm gonna live.

Damn straight. Her chin firms. She grips her gun heroically.

The door groans and slowly crumples inward. Bloodied hands and weapons reach through the gap. The howls from the other side of it are terrible.

Everyone raises their weapon and aims for the door.

ZOË
Here they come!

The first Reaver scrambles in...

...and is obliterated by bullets as everyone in the room fires on him!

And more Reavers just step right over his corpse and keep on coming.

Jayne cuts loose a salvo from Vera. Zoë shoots, rechambers, shoots.

Inara aims and looses a bolt, taking a Reaver down through the eye. Kaylee fires and misses, fires again. Simon aims, squeezes off a shot.

River screams and crouches.

JAYNE
Come and get it, ya bastards!

This is it. Do or die.

The crew fires. The Reavers fall. More pour in.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX –UNIVERSE'S PAD – SAME TIME

Mal and Ben enter it and pull up short, stunned.

The room is completely trashed. Screens are dark where they aren't outright shattered. Keyboards and other peripherals litter the counters and floor like so much electronic confetti, smashed to bits.

Mal takes an unsteady step forward.

MAL

No.

Ben eyes everything up and down, deflating. He's waded through hell and Reavers for this?

Mal strides forward, taps a keyboard as if to bring it back to life, slams his open palm on the keys when the gambit fails.

MAL (cont'd)

(getting louder)

No, no, no... It's gone.

He grabs the keyboard and using it as a club, starts whaling away at the rest of the equipment. Losing it. Just going nuts.

MAL (cont'd)

All gone!

(bang!)

I promised—

(bang!)

—but I—

(bang!)

—can't—

(bang!)

—do—

(bang!)

THIS!

Ben, no dummy, backs away quickly from the war zone and slips on something on the floor. BLOOD. A trail of it, leading to—

A couch. MR. UNIVERSE is there, sprawled facedown in his Lovebot LENORE's lap. Lenore stares into the middle distance, oblivious to the blood soaking the upholstery, her dress, Universe's jacket. Oblivious to Mal's bashing stuff to bits.

Both figures on the couch are still as death.

Ben moves closer to check the body and three steps from it Lenore stirs to life, speaking in an odd amalgamation of Mr. Universe's voice and a machine's digital clipped twang.

LENORE

Mal.

Ben freezes, transfixed by the eerie-assed creepiness of it.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – BLACK ROOM ALCOVE – SAME TIME

Zoë stands like Horatius at the bridge, firing, chambering, firing. Her mare's leg goes empty. She holsters it and draws her knife, lashes out. She slices a Reaver open, whips into another one. And another. And another.

She's in a berserker frenzy now, hitting anything that moves. Hitting and killing. Reaver-like. Gone.

JAYNE

Zoë! Get your ass back in the line!

She turns, sanity back in her eyes.

A Reaver sword slashes her back.

Zoë cries out, rears. Falls.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX –UNIVERSE'S PAD – SAME TIME

Mal swings away, trashing the equipment.

BEN

Mal!

MAL

(to himself)

Said it won't be for nothin'...

Ben moves closer, but still keeps a safe distance.

BEN

Mal!

MAL

(still to himself)

Promised him it wouldn't be for nothin'!

He's deep in his own little Mal-land. Ben runs over and grabs his arm, throws him off his swing, ducks as Mal takes a swipe at him.

BEN

MAL!

Ben grabs a fistful of Mal's shirt and shakes him hard.

BEN

You need to see this.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – BLACK ROOM ALCOVE – SAME TIME

Jayne's laying down covering fire as he advances toward Zoë. Simon is right behind him and gets a grip on Zoë's jacket, starts dragging her to safety.

Bullets whine overhead and Jayne ducks, firing back as the Reavers close in.

Inara fires and kills another Reaver a cat's whisker away from slicing Jayne.

Simon, Zoë, and Jayne make it back behind the barricade. Jayne fires and ducks.

JAYNE

(to Simon)

Ruttin' Reavers ain't supposed'ta use guns.

(to the advancing Reavers)

Cheaters! Oh, ya want some'a this? Yeah?

He fires furiously at the advancing enemy, then ducks down and glares at Simon in frustration.

JAYNE (cont'd)

What the hell're we 'sposed ta do when the gorram
Reavers won't follow the gorram rules?

Jayne rises again and fires Vera. She clicks empty. Jayne grabs another gun from his arsenal and continues to lay down fire.

JAYNE

Ruttin' mother-humpers picked the wrong gorram
restaurant tonight!

Simon rolls Zoë over and examines her back. It's a cut-up bloody mess. He probes it with his fingers.

SIMON

The spine's intact.

ZOË

I'm fine. Just gimme a damn bandage.

Simon turns and gestures to his bag beside Inara. Inara bends to pick it up and narrowly misses getting knifed by a Reaver.

Kaylee shoots it point blank, killing it. It falls across the boxes of her barricade and she uses it for cover. She's missing more than hitting, but still... Kaylee's got some spine and continues firing.

Inara pulls a SPRAY-CAN out of the bag and tosses it to Simon.

Simon puts the nozzle of the can to Zoë's back and out squirts something that looks remarkably like shaving cream. It hardens instantly, sealing the wound with an elastic covering.

Zoë claws up to her feet and grabs her mare's leg.

ZOË

They're breaching!

And so they are, a good half dozen of them pouring in and rushing the barricades. The crew fires on them, scoring a few kills that slow the others down.

But the Reavers are gaining ground.

River watches, her calm shredding under the onslaught of violence and noise. She claps her hands to her ears and starts to wail.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX –UNIVERSE'S PAD – SAME TIME

Mal and Ben stand a few feet away from the couch. Mal looks at Ben expectantly.

Ben waves a hand in front of Lenore. She revives.

LENORE

Mal.

Mal jumps, startled.

LENORE (cont'd)

Guy killed me, Mal. Killed me with a sword. How weird is that?

Mal grows quiet as he listens to the recording. The battered keyboard he's still holding drops with a clatter to the floor.

LENORE (cont'd)

I got...a short span here... They destroyed my equipment but I have a back-up unit... Southwest branch of the complex, right over the generator. Hard to get to. I know they missed it. They can't stop the signal, Mal. They can never stop the signal.

(beat)

Okay, this is painful. On many levels. I'm not...

Lenore slows, droops, and shuts down. Recording over.

Mal gently closes Mr. Universe's eyes. Bows his head.

Silence.

Mal looks up at Ben with a purpose.

MAL

Find me that generator room.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – BLACK ROOM ALCOVE – SAME TIME

Meanwhile, things are getting not so smooth for our crew.

ZOË

Jayne! Grenade!

He pops it and tosses it just as more Reavers pour through the breach—the blast takes most of them out. One flies forward, skids and comes right up on Kaylee, hacking at her as she fires wildly, scoring wounds but not the kill.

The Reaver falls, twitching, dragging forward. Together, Kaylee and Simon pump enough bullets into it to end it.

More Reavers keep coming.

River is backed into the corner and looking rocky. She grips her head and wails.

RIVER

I can't shut them up...

SIMON

(crouching down by her)

Sh-hh, it's okay...

He reaches into a vest pocket for a HYPODERMIC filled with green liquid: delcium.

RIVER

They're...they're all made up of rage. I can't...

She swats it away. He frowns, puts it back.

SIMON

Stay low. I'm right here.

JAYNE

She sure picked a sweet bung of a time to go helpless on us.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX –UNIVERSE'S PAD – SAME TIME

Ben sits on a salvaged chair in the wreckage of Mr. Universe's tech set-up. His laptop sits amid the carnage, cables running from it into some of the other machinery.

MAL (OS, via com)

Are you sure I wasn't supposed to take that last left?

BEN

Who's sussin' the schematics? Me or you?

MAL (via com)

Yeah, but—

(beat)

Hey...

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX –MONORAIL STATION – SAME TIME

The station is dark, unused, lit only by a few flickering fluorescent panels.

MAL (cont'd)

Monorail.

The MONORAIL, little more than a trolley on a track, sits in the middle of the room, between two dusty platforms. Across from Mal is another entrance into the station.

BEN (OS, via com)

Everything look good?

Mal moves to the monorail, but nothing happens. Doors stay closed. Lights stay off. It's dead.

MAL

This could be a problem.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX –UNIVERSE'S PAD – SAME TIME

Ben is pulling up all kinds of schematics on his laptop. In the corner, he's got a small security-camera image of Mal.

BEN

Yeah, okay, I see what's going on. That whole section of the tower is on standby power.

MAL (OS, via com)

Standby power? How do we make that not happen?

BEN

I think you can... Yeah... No. No, wait. Easiest thing's gonna be for you to use the manual override.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX –MONORAIL STATION – SAME TIME

Mal has a panel labeled "MANUAL OVERRIDE" open on the side of the monorail. He stares in at the jumble of CABLES and WIRES.

MAL

Easiest thing. Yeah. Sure.

BEN (OS, via com)

There should be a green socket.

MAL

(studying it)

Or three.

BEN (via com)

Try the middle one first.

MAL

What do I do with it?

BEN (via com)

Just plug in the—

Mal waits.

Waits a little more.

MAL

Ben? Just plug in the what?

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX –UNIVERSE'S PAD – SAME TIME

Ben's laptop is closed and he's standing, looking nervously toward the door—

BEN

Thank God you're here, sir! I sure could use some help!

—at the Operative.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – BLACK ROOM ALCOVE – SAME TIME

A vent panel gives way near the ceiling. The Reavers are in the ducts now, and trying to get in.

Simon sees them, yells over the noise to Jayne, and starts shooting at the Reavers clawing their way out.

SIMON

The vents! They're in the vents!

Jayne is too busy keeping the Reavers to the front and center at bay.

Zoë turns from them and adds her fire to Simon's.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX –UNIVERSE'S PAD – SAME TIME

The Operative walks into the room, drawing his fancy LASER PISTOL.

OPERATIVE

Who are you?

BEN

(no hesitation)

Clay.

Ben raises his hands and slowly backs away from him, bringing the Operative into the room... which also draws him away from the laptop.

BEN (cont'd)

Will you look at what they've done to my boss? Hell, his place? It's gonna take me months to get it all back online.

The Operative doesn't quite know what to make of Ben. He looks around, examining the situation. He almost spots the laptop—

BEN (cont'd)

(grabbing the Operative's arm)

Tell me you brought techs with you to help me fix it! I'm workin' my fingers to the bone doing it all by myself.

The Operative shrugs Ben off. Ben takes a few steps back, hands up again.

OPERATIVE

If you're alone, young man, then who were you just talking to?

BEN

(step back)

Myself. Whistle while you work an' all that.

(step back)

Makes the day go fast—

And then Ben takes one step too many, activating Lenore.

LENORE

Mal... Guy killed me, Mal.

Ben blinks. Looks at the Operative. He KNOWS, dammit, the Operative KNOWS.

LENORE (cont'd)

Killed me with a sword.

The Operative is on Ben in a second.

LENORE (cont'd)

How weird is that?

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – BLACK ROOM ALCOVE

Dead Reavers clog the vent, blocking the others in the duct behind them.

ZOË

Find something to close them off. Kaylee! Get your torch.

Kaylee shouts and points behind Zoë.

Zoë spins, fires, and a Reaver falls mid-air to the floor, thrashing his last.

INT. UNI'S COMPLEX – BLACK ROOM ALCOVE VENT– CONTINUOUS

A metal plate slams over the vent, held in place by Simon.

Kaylee fires up her torch and put it to the plate.

The others keep firing at the Reavers.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX –MONORAIL STATION – SAME TIME

MAL
(bored)
Ben? You there?

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – BLACK ROOM ALCOVE – SAME TIME

Kaylee's panel is welded in place, but there are more vents giving way and the Reavers are worming out of them. Kaylee turns to look for more metal to block the vents and darts hiss across the room, embedding in her neck.

River screams.

Kaylee falters and touches the darts, which are filled with nasty green fluid.

SIMON
Kaylee!

He catches her as she crumples.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX –MONORAIL STATION – SAME TIME

Mal looks at the open panel. Then he grabs a cable.

MAL
(to himself)
Always the red one, right, Kaylee?

He connects it to the middle green plug.

Nothing.

Unhooks it and tries connecting it to the second green plug.

The monorail comes to life—

MAL (cont'd)
(whooping)
Wooo—!

—taking off down the track, leaving Mal stranded and facing—

MAL (cont'd)
(finishing weakly)
—who?

—the Operative, who stands on the other platform, previously masked by the bulk of the monorail.

OPERATIVE
Hello, Malcolm.

Act Three

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX –MONORAIL STATION – SAME TIME

Mal freezes as the Operative draws his pistol and aims it right at him.

The Operative fires twice—

And Mal is surprised when he doesn't die. The Operative fires again, now shooting PAST Mal, and Mal turns to see—

REAVERS!

More than a half dozen of them rushing across the platform at him.

Mal slams his hand down on the monorail EMERGENCY RECALL button and jumps across the track, yelling as he goes:

MAL
Truce! Don't shoot!

OPERATIVE
Done!

Mal lands hard and low on the other side, skidding. He tumbles around and comes up firing.

Mal and the Operative stand shoulder to shoulder, firing across the monorail track at the seven Reavers on the other side.

The Reavers have stopped instinctively at the edge of the track, almost treating it like a riverbank. Two of their number are shot down, but then they start throwing things—DARTS, JAGGED PIECES OF METAL, even something that might be a HAND—and Mal and the Operative backpedal, looking for cover.



One of the Reavers bunches up and charges across the chasm of the monorail track—

Only to be slammed by the returning monorail! The Reaver's twitching body is pinned to the wall by the vehicle.

Mal and the Operative rush toward the monorail as the doors begin to slide open. But one of the Reavers, jumps onto the roof, howling, and throws a dagger—

Mal pushes the Operative out of the way, saving him.

OPERATIVE

Thank—

MAL

Don't take this the wrong way, but this don't mean we're engaged or nothin'!

The Operative shoots the Reaver on the roof. Mal runs into—

THE MONORAIL

MAL (cont'd)

In fact—

The Operative jumps in behind him and skids on landing.

MAL (cont'd)
—I'm calling the whole thing off.

Mal grabs him by the harness and uses his momentum to swing him out the other side of the monorail cab—right into the three remaining Reavers, who are trying to get in.

The doors close. Mal looks out the window as the monorail pulls away.

The Operative and the Reavers are in a snarling heap on the platform.

Mal sits down.

MAL (cont'd)
It never would'a worked, darlin'. Incompatible differences.

He turns away from the window, looking forward.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – BLACK ROOM ALCOVE – SAME TIME

ZOË
Fall back! NOW!

The room is crawling with Reavers and the crew fires and falls back through the blast doors. Zoë is the last through and she slaps her hand on the door controls and steps backwards through the door, firing away.

The doors slide toward their center, closing...

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – ELEVATOR CORRIDOR – CONTINUOUS

The crew stares at the doors as they close.

The doors narrow to an iris-like hole and jam.

Jam open.

Crap.

ZOË (cont'd)
Jayne! Grenade!

JAYNE
Got just the one...

Jayne tosses it right through the four-foot by four-foot hole. Zoë doesn't even flinch as the blast hits the Reavers beyond. Smoke and body parts blow through the opening.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – GENERATOR ROOM –SAME TIME

Mal has reached the generator room and surveys the situation. He stands at a railing and looks down on the GENERATOR SHAFT.

It's a big damn death pit, miles deep with machines constantly rotating and grinding, and arcs of electricity ricochet around it.

On the other side the shaft is a small ISLAND of a platform, on which sits the equipment to broadcast the message.

There are CABLES and CHAINS running along the walls and across the space above, suspended in most part from ladder-like metal BEAMS spanning the shaft.

The CATWALK bridging the shaft to the far platform is disengaged, folded away.

Mal steps to the console at the railing and punches the buttons. The catwalk lies quiescent. Broken, of course.

MAL
(stymied)
Hard to get to? That's a fact.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – ELEVATOR CORRIDOR – SAME TIME

Silence...

Then snarls mutter through the smoke.

ZOË
They're gonna get in. Try 'n plug the hole with them.

Kaylee has been carried to a long box and laid upon it. She raises her head and calls weakly to Zoë and Jayne.

KAYLEE
I can... close it from the panel.

ZOË
No one's coming back from that.

Zoë looks over at Jayne, who is leaning against the wall, loading Vera. He's wounded but he's still able to fight.

Zoë is in worse shape and she slowly sinks to the floor next to Jayne. She hefts her weapon and grimaces at its weight.

ZOË
(quietly so the others won't hear)
How much ammo do we have?

JAYNE
(chambering a round)
We got three full cartridges and my swingin' cod. That's all.

ZOE
That's not going to be enough.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – GENERATOR ROOM –SAME TIME

Mal looks over and some ten feet to his right there is a conveyance, a large metal BUCKET—big enough for a man—on a pulley chain. Mal grabs the chain and the bucket swings out over the chasm.

MAL
That's a bit more like it...

Mal heaves on the chain to bring the bucket over the rail... and it snaps, the bucket falling into the crushing machinery below.

Mal lets go the chain before he can be dragged down after it and staggers back.

MAL (cont'd)
Gorrammit!

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – ELEVATOR CORRIDOR – SAME TIME

Inara is by the elevator button, pounding for it to come.

INARA
The lift isn't moving.

Jayne catches Zoë's attention.

JAYNE
What about her?

He points his chin at River, who is standing by herself, uninvolved.

JAYNE (cont'd)
Ain't she supposed'ta be some kinda killin' machine?
(brightening)
The trigger! In the cartoon! We gotta do that! Make her
all... killy!

RIVER
A machine...

She looks down at Simon's gun, discarded while he examines Kaylee.

Jayne shoots the first Reaver that tries to get through. He looks at River, bobbing his head and happily singing:

JAYNE
FRUITY OATY BARS, HEY! WOW! FRUITY BARS, MAKE A
MAN OF A MOUSE

Simon looks up from Kaylee.

SIMON
The trigger's not in the song, you cretin.

JAYNE
(quietly)
Well, now I know that.

RIVER
No more triggers...

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – GENERATOR ROOM –SAME TIME

The bucket is gone. The only feasible way across is going hand over hand along the beams, monkey-bars style.

Mal eyeballs the height from the platform he's on, climbs the railing, reaches up and grabs hold of a rung. He swings over the deadly space, moving his hands to the next rung, and then the next...

Blue fire spits across the platform and hits him in the back. Mal loses his grip on the rungs and falls back to the platform.

He rolls and comes up on his feet, looking behind him.

The Operative stands there, smoking gun in hand, cold fury etched on his face.

MAL
(indignantly)
You shot me in the back! I haven't made you angry, have I?

Mal rotates his right arm from the shoulder, testing it.

The Operative steps forward. Mal moves to keep some distance between them.

OPERATIVE
There are a lot of innocent people in the air being killed right now.

MAL
(flexing his right hand)
You have no idea how true that is. And since when did you give a baboon's crack for innocent folk?

There's no wise-ass attitude in Mal now, and his lip curls as he continues.

MAL (cont'd)
I know the secret. The truth that burned up River Tam's brain. And you can cover your ears and hum all you like, but the rest of the 'Verse is gonna know it, too. 'Cause they need to.

OPERATIVE
Do you really believe that?

MAL
(no fear...)
I do.

OPERATIVE
Are you willing to die for that belief?

MAL
(...none whatsoever)
I am.

The Operative shoots but Mal is faster.

He shoots the gun from the Operative's hand and he keeps on shooting. Once, twice, thrice. The sparks fly off the Operative's body armor and a shot grazes him on the head. He falls back to find cover behind some crates.

MAL (cont'd)
(snorting)
'Course, that ain't exactly 'Plan A'.

Mal holsters his gun and runs, puts a foot up on the railing without breaking stride and keeps rising, flings an arm out and grabs the rungs overhead.

He swings hand over hand toward the far platform. Come hell or high water, he's going to send that damn 'wave.

The Operative sees his moment, grabs for his gun—but it's been ruined by Mal's shot.

The Operative runs at the railing, vaults off it and grabs a chain. It snaps and he swings, grabbing another chain. And then another, crossing the shaft chain by chain.

His way is more dangerous, less reliable.

Also: faster.

The Operative reaches Mal and double kicks him from behind.

Mal loses his grip and falls toward certain death—

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – ELEVATOR CORRIDOR – SAME TIME

Kaylee cries out, and Simon returns his attention to her.

KAYLEE

I'm starting to...lose some feeling here...

Simon is leaning over her, keeping her from getting up.

SIMON

Lie still. I'm gonna give you something to counteract the...

He reaches around to his side for his medic's bag and clutches empty air.

SIMON (cont'd)

(realizing with horror)

My bag. It's—

—and SHKOWW! the bullet takes Simon in the belly—

—everything suddenly moving very slowly as he spins slightly, one foot lifted, a confused expression on his face—

—then speeding right back up as he slams down on his back, gasping for air.

INARA

Simon!

River is stunned speechless, her mouth is moving but no sound comes out.

Blood starts to pour from his gut and Simon puts his hands to the wound, and writhes as the pain hits him.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – GENERATOR ROOM –SAME TIME

Mal manages to grab a chain... just barely. Momentum swings him toward the Operative and Mal readies a kick to the other man's gut.

But the Operative is like frikkin' Tarzan. He climbs up and pulls a lever releasing Mal's chain.

Mal's chain chatters through its pulley and Mal falls free. A chain below him clotheslines him across the chest and Mal grabs onto it.

Saved again!

MAL

Arrgh!

He looks up and sees the Operative making his way quickly to the far platform.

MAL (cont'd)

Ruttin' showoff...

Mal hand-over-hands himself up that damned lucky chain for the far platform.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – ELEVATOR CORRIDOR – SAME TIME

Inara presses her silk sash to Simon's wound as a makeshift bandage. She grabs his hand.

INARA

Keep pressure on it...

The lights go out, leaving the place terribly dim—possibly the Reavers' doing. Everyone looks about them. Jayne fires again at the entry.

SIMON

(gasping through the pain)

My bag. Need... adrenaline... and a shot of calaphar for
Kaylee... I can't...

(swallowing hard)

...River? Where's River?

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – GENERATOR ROOM ISLAND – SAME TIME

Mal has made it to the far platform.

The Operative is on Mal before he can get his footing, tackling him. Mal is saved from oblivion by the platform railing, but his gun flies out of his hand into some boxes of stuff beneath the BROADWAVE EQUIPMENT.

Furious, Mal comes back with a couple of hammer blows and gets the Operative off him. They square off. Mal stumbles back into a TOOLBOX, knocking over TOOLS and COMPUTER PARTS.

The Operative reaches behind him and in one graceful move, pulls his sword from its scabbard.

Mal reaches behind him and in one graceful move, pulls out from the tool box a... TINY SCREWDRIVER.

A beat. Then:

OPERATIVE

This hardly seems fair.

MAL

That's life. Tends to come at ya sideways.

Mal hurls the toolbox at the Operative and rushes him, gets inside the sword's range and aims for the Operative's neck with his screwdriver.

The Operative blocks Mal's move and works the sword's point against the edge of Mal's belly. Starts pushing slowly, despite Mal's hands on his, and pierces cloth.

Pierces flesh.

Mal stares at the Operative, his expression stunned.

The Operative slides his sword right THROUGH Mal and out the other side of him.

Mal's eyes go wide with shock.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – ELEVATOR CORRIDOR – SAME TIME

SIMON

(failing)

...Mei-mei?

River is by his side. She has a kind of serenity to her, like she understands something now.

SIMON (cont'd)
River? ... River...I'm sorry...

RIVER
(gently shushing him)
No... No...

SIMON
I hate... I hate to leave...

River sees the delcium hypodermic in his vest pocket. She starts to reach for it, but instead touches his cheek.

RIVER
You won't. You take care of me, Simon. You've always
taken care of me.

She stands as the EMERGENCY LIGHTS come on, giving her face an unearthly glow as she looks down at him.

RIVER (cont'd)
My turn.

She's running so fast, nobody else has time to react until she DIVES through the hole in the doors, then Simon SCREAMS her name, the scream following us back into the room where River lands in a perfect roll—

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – BLACK ROOM ALCOVE – CONTINUOUS

—and comes up in a room full of Reavers.

She shoots up on her feet in a forward punch, laying out the Reaver directly in front of her. Then in a lightning move, she grabs another Reaver's spear, spins and thrusts him away.

She lays out with the spear, clearing a path to the door.

She runs, hits the controls, grabs the wires and twists them.

The doors start to move.

River swoops down, picks up Simon's bag and throws it through the shrinking opening.

Done!

Then the Reavers' hands descend on her and pull her away from the door.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – ELEVATOR CORRIDOR– CONTINUOUS

Visibly horrified by what he sees, Simon tries to cry out River's name but he has no breath left. His head falls back, his eyes roll up and he bleeds.

Through the closing door, River reaches for the opening, for her friends. For salvation.

The Reavers pull her back.

The door closes.

She's gone.



INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX –UNIVERSE'S PAD – SAME TIME

CLOSE ON Ben's face: eyes open, mouth open, lying sideways in a sticky pool of blood.

Dead.

Or not—he blinks.

Ben coughs, starts to shakily drag himself up. He touches a hand to his bloody cheek.

BEN
(groggy)
Blood...
(less groggy)
Not my blood...
(elated)
Not my blood!
(disgusted)
Not my blood!!!

He springs up and away from the blood, which is a patch from the path between Universe's chair and couch.

Now standing, he looks around, swaying a little. He works his back and shoulders, like he's been injured there.

BEN (cont'd)
...the hell kinda punch was that?

He moves to his laptop. Opens it, starts clicking away. We don't see what he's seeing, but from the light reflected on his face, he's flashing through multiple images.

BEN

<Who knew bad came in so many flavors>?

Ben shuts his laptop with a slap, pulls the connections free and runs out with his computer under his arm.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – GENERATOR ROOM ISLAND – SAME TIME

The Operative grips Mal's shoulder—in part to keep him from falling—and looks him in the eye.

OPERATIVE

Do you know what your sin is, Malcolm?

MAL

(shaky smile)

Aw, hell... I'm a fan of all seven.

Mal headbutts the Operative viciously, then punches him so hard the man falls back, losing his grip on the sword.

The Operative instantly recovers with a dazzling spin kick and Mal drives his screwdriver right into the Operative's leading foot.

Mal yanks the screwdriver—and the Operative's leg—closer to him and plows his fist right into the Operative's chin.

The Operative goes down hard, the screwdriver ripping his foot on the way down, and watches, dazed, as Mal grabs the sword skewering his innards.

MAL (cont'd)

But right now...

Mal pulls the sword out with a thin grunt, grimacing. He flexes his fingers on the grip and holds it over the Operative, his smile completely gone.

MAL (cont'd)

...right now, I'm gonna have to go with wrath.

On the last word, Mal stabs down at the Operative's face.

The Operative rolls out of the way, kicks Mal from the ground and is up in a second. He grabs Mal's sword hand.

The sword drops and the Operative punches Mal right in his gut wound. Viciously. Repeatedly.

Mal doubles over, then brings his head up explosively in a backwards headbutt to the Operative's chin.

The Operative staggers back and the two of them rush at each other again, more animal than ever.

No holds barred. No fancy speeches about honor or sin. Nothing's left but to win.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – ELEVATOR CORRIDOR– SAME TIME

The gang is subdued. They're all of them injured and Simon is slipping away.

JAYNE
I can still hear 'em.

The Reavers are still clanging. Their snarls drift faintly through the door, audible in the quiet of the corridor.

Inara turns from Kaylee, where she has been checking her, a hypodermic gun in her hand. She looks at the closed door River disappeared through.

INARA
What they're doing to her... That poor girl...

She looks away.

JAYNE
If the elevator comes back we can—

INARA
Maybe Kaylee, but we can't move Simon. It'll kill him.

Jayne drops back onto an elbow, defeated. He looks over at Zoë.

JAYNE
You suppose he got through? Think Mal got the word out?

Zoë doesn't answer right away.

ZOË
(almost convincingly)
He got through. I know he got through.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – GENERATOR ROOM ISLAND – SAME TIME

Mal goes down hard, planting his face on the transparent platform floor, spitting up blood. He sees the sword, moves for it—but the Operative kicks him in the face.

The Operative picks Mal up. Mal tries to punch back, but he's losing steam... which the Operative shows no sign of doing.

OPERATIVE

I'm sorry.

The Operative spins Mal like a rag doll and DIGS the bunched fingers of his right hand right into the same nerve cluster that he's used with previous targets.

Mal goes rigid, his face nothing but a rictus of pain. He trembles against the com equipment console, his eyes darting wide to stay on his adversary.

The Operative retrieves his sword from the floor, scraping it up with a metallic slither. Mal shudders, trying to move... but nothing happens.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)

You should know there's no shame in this. You've done remarkable things. But you're fighting a war you've already lost.

He lunges.

And Mal—bloodied, beaten, gut-stabbed Mal—spins gracefully out of the way, grabbing the Operative's sword-hand and pulling it forward, driving his elbow into the Operative's throat with staggering force.

MAL

(panting)

Well, I'm known for that.

The Operative's hands fly for his battered throat, dropping the sword. He stumbles back unable to make a sound, barely able to even breathe.

Mal spins him, grabbing both his arms and threading his own through them in a twisted full nelson. Mal brings his arms up suddenly and the Operative's arms crack! loudly.

Mal drops the Operative against the railing in a sitting position and picks up the man's sword, saying:

MAL (cont'd)

Piece'a shrapnel tore up that nerve cluster my first tour of duty. I had it moved. You special ops types always go for that sucker, too.

He squats eye-to-eye with the Operative.

MAL (cont'd)

Sorry 'bout the throat. Expect you'd wanna say your famous last words now. Just one trouble.

Mal reaches over the railing, pulls the back of the Operative's harness up and threads the sword over and under both it and the railing, pinning the Operative in place.

MAL (cont'd)

I ain't gonna kill you.

He moves to the broadcast equipment, prepping it to send.

MAL (cont'd)

Hell, I'm gonna grant your greatest wish.

Mal inserts the CYLINDER holding the MIRANDA RECORDING into the reader, turns it slightly. It hums to life.

MAL (cont'd)

I'm gonna show you a world without sin.

He hits 'SEND ALL.' The reader lights up and the broadcast begins.

Here, it is projected as a two-dimensional image on a VIEW SCREEN, right in front of the Operative, who swallows and gasps for air.

CARON (VO, via broadcast)

These are just a few of the images we recorded...

Mal bends over the boxes under the console and fetches his pistol. Grimacing, he straightens and limps over to the railing. No way back across. Mal looks about ready to fall over—

CARON (VO, cont'd)

As you can see it isn't...

And then a FOLDING CATWALK unfurls at his feet, curling around like a metal wave and flattening, making a solid path all the way across the shaft.

Ben is on the other side, his laptop hacked into the catwalk controls.

CARON (VO, cont'd)

It isn't what we thought.

Mal steps onto the catwalk.

CARON (VO, cont'd)
There's been no war here...

Mal keeps going. He doesn't look back.

CARON (VO, cont'd)
...and no terraforming event.

He makes it to

THE OTHER SIDE

and holds on to the railing a moment, catching his breath. Ben grabs Mal's arm and helps him step up to the platform.

MAL
What the hell took you so long?

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – BLACK ROOM ALCOVE – SAME TIME

A Reaver lunges forward, face full of fury, swinging his blade in a frenzy of hate.

CARON (VO)
...it was supposed to calm the population, weed out aggression.

A small hand smashes into his face with such force that teeth go flying. The Reaver falls and we see...

River.

She is bloodied, but not dead. She's as she was in the bar—moving faster and more efficiently than anyone can.

Ducking and weaving.

Gutting and kicking.

In a room full of Reavers.

There are piles of Reaver bodies thick on the floor, yet she never breaks concentration as she uses their weapons against them, doing everything in her power to stay one step ahead of, or above, the mob.

She pirouettes into the Lead Reaver who pursued the crew earlier. Easily disarms the Lead Reaver and chops her brutally with her own ax. The dying Reaver pushes River away hard.

She slams backwards into the wall opposite the blast doors—and a GRAPPLING HOOK punches through the wall just inches from her head.

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – ELEVATOR CORRIDOR

The crew is still trying to patch up. Noise filters through the blast doors. Everyone flinches and looks at the doors when a loud CLANG! sounds from the far side.

No one mentions River.

At the far end of the hallway, at the ELEVATOR CONTROL PANEL, a big button glows green and a loud hum issues from the elevator shaft.

The crew faces the elevator doors, exhausted and not sure what they will find when the elevator arrives.

The elevator doors open and Mal hobbles out, with Ben supporting him. Mal looks like he probably shouldn't be alive.

ZOË
 (standing painfully)
 Sir?

MAL
It's done. Report.

Zoë looks at the badly wounded Simon, at Inara crouched at his side. Zoë draws breath to speak—

And the blast doors start to open behind her.

Everyone turns to look, those who can feebly raising weapons, as the square iris of the opening blast doors widens to reveal River. She is holding two Reaver blades, is bloody but unbowed.

And she is the only one alive, standing in a room carpeted with Reaver corpses. Everyone stares, stunned.

Silence.

Then:

INT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – BLACK ROOM ALCOVE – CONTINUOUS

The GRAPPLING HOOKS embedded in the wall shudder and with a groan, the wall is PULLED violently out, spraying debris and dust everywhere, leaving a huge ragged HOLE.

River stands haloed in the orange light that spills in from the other side, grey smoke billowing around her.

We see the grappling hooks are chained to huge CONSTRUCTION MACHINES.

River tenses but does not turn as heavily armed ALLIANCE SOLDIERS come through the smoke.

A half dozen. A dozen.

More.

BLACKOUT